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ABSTRACT

Distance education is becoming a major delivery mechanism for teacher education programs in special education, especially for rural areas. Whatever the delivery system, telecourses depend on the mutual efforts of an instructor and a producer to satisfy the demands of both academic content and production values. Both instructor and producer have equal and complementary roles and responsibilities in designing and delivering telecourses. Thus, a productive instructor-producer relationship is the cornerstone of successful telecourse instruction. The keys to such a relationship are relationship building activities, collaborative efforts, and coordinated action. Some strategies for developing an effective working relationship are: (1) spending sufficient time together to develop understanding and appreciation of each other's knowledge, working style, strengths, and weaknesses; (2) observing the other at work so that the instructor understands production activities, and the producer understands the instructor's style and purpose; (3) sharing individual areas of expertise so that each partner understands the other's perspective well enough to support mutual goals; (4) devising formats that match technical procedures of the producer to content purposes of the instructor; and (5) critiquing taped sessions together, especially when the instructor and producer first begin to work together. Successful partnerships take time to develop; an ongoing relationship between one producer and one instructor across one or more telecourses results in the most productive working relationship. (Contains 25 references.) (TD)

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THE INSTRUCTOR-PRODUCER RELATIONSHIP: A PARTNERSHIP FOR EFFECTIVE DISTANCE EDUCATION

Distance education is rapidly assuming growing importance as a major delivery mechanism for teacher education programs in special education at colleges and universities. As higher education adapts to meet the changing demands of the information age, institutions across the country are increasingly making use of television technology to deliver individual courses as well as entire programs (Duning, Van Kekerix, & Zaborowski, 1993; Halpern, 1994; Jacobsen, 1994;). Nowhere is this so evident or so important as in rural areas, because of the many demands for and constraints upon preservice and inservice preparation of special educators.

Distance education relying upon telecommunications technology has been noted as an important strategy in addressing critical shortages in special education (Berkeley & Ludlow, 1991; Howard, Ault, Knowlton, & Swall, 1992; Ludlow, 1995; Sebastian, 1995). A variety of special distance education projects have been implemented to prepare rural special educators at the preservice and inservice levels during the last ten (10) years (Bender, McLaughlin, & Erhart, 1993; Condon, Zimmerman, & Beane, 1989; Egan, McCleary, Sebastian, & Lacy, 1989; Knapczyk, 1993; Lombardi, Bauer, Peters, & O'Keefe, 1992; Ludlow, 1994; McIntosh & Raymond, 1988; Royce, Cummings, & Chaney, 1990; Rule & Stowitschek, 1991; Shaeffer & Shaeffer, 1993; Slayton & Lacefield, 1991). These programs have utilized a wide range of technologies across a number of rural states to prepare teachers and related service specialists for students with special needs ranging from mild to severe.

Televised courses for distance education may be broadcast live via satellite, microwave, ISDN telephone lines or cable television, or they may be disseminated as pre-recorded videotaped packages. Such courses require the coordination of many different activities by a number of university-based personnel, because of the complexity of telecommunications technologies (Keegan, 1990; Garrison, 1989; Rowntree, 1986). Teamwork, especially between instructional experts and production personnel, is seen by many as the foundation of successful technology-based distance education programs (Eastmond, 1994; Holloway & Ohler, 1991; Sebastian, Egan, Page, Nkabinde, & Jones, 1993). Whatever the delivery system selected, telecourses depend on the mutual efforts on an instructor and a producer to satisfy the demands of both academic content and production values. Thus, the development and maintenance of a productive instructor-producer relationship is the cornerstone of successful telecourse instruction.

Imagine the telecourse as a dance, with the instructor and producer as partners, each responsible for sensing and responding to the moves of the other. The instructor leads the dance as the executive producer in charge of content and on-screen talent and so must feel supported by the producer behind the scenes to feel comfortable in a new role and to project a confident and competent image. The producer follows the instructor's lead as a responsive partner, coordinating personnel and equipment to translate the content through the technologies to the students. The dancers respond individually and mutually to the unique strains of the music of the telecourse situation, adjusting themselves to the rhythms

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of the particular broadcast, the given course, and the academic semester. Like teamwork between expert dancers, the instructor-producer relationship requires communication and coordination and opportunities for practice and improvement. Although even simple courses benefit from this teamwork, more complex courses depend upon it.

Roles and Responsibilities

Both instructor and producer have equal and complementary roles to play in designing and delivering telecourses. Individual and joint responsibilities must be met to if telecourse instruction is to be successful.

Instructor Roles and Responsibilities

The instructor is the content expert, with expertise in a particular discipline and subject area related to this course. Generally, the instructor has already taught the course on a campus setting, but occasionally instructors may develop new courses specifically for televised delivery. The instructor is responsible for mapping out the schedule of class sessions and the topics to be covered in each, for selecting instructional methods and materials and student learning activities, and for preparing a script or outline for each class that describes the sequence of events. It is essential that the instructor communicate to the producer the essence or his or her philosophy and teaching style to insure that these are represented by the video elements of the telcourse. The instructor should set the tone of the course as warm and personal, light and entertaining, or weighty and serious, so that the producer can select any music, coover footage, graphics or other materials to be consonant with the image the instructor wishes to convey.

The instructor can make the producer's job easier by learning enough about the television equipment and formats to organize instruction to make the best use of them. Graphics should be designed to accomodate the size of the screen and the particular features and limitations of the equipment used to generate them. Instructors must learn to utilize window dub tape versaions to select tape segments to be edited by the producer. The instructor should spend some time observing the producer at work during another, similar telecourse to learn the time and effort needed to accomplish certain complex activities (such as airing graphics screens, initiating a tape roll-in); this will allow him or her to establish more accurate timing and pacing throughout the telecourse sessions. By preparing materials to meet broadcast specifications or constraints of specific studios or systems, the instructor simplifies the task of production personnel and prevents a constant battle between instructor and producer over the quality of the image that will appear on screen.

Producer Roles and Responsibilities

The producer is the technical expert, with expertise in utilizing telecommunications technology to produce the images that appear on screen. The producer typically has experience in many aspects of video production, but sometimes producers have not previously been involved in telecourse production. The producer is responsible for selecting the best delivery mechanisms to accomplish instructor goals, for operating video, audio and computer equipment during broadcast or taping sessions, and for directing other personnel such as camera and audio operators. The producer should take time to explain the opportunities and constraints represented by the various equipment available so that the instructor can tailor his or her expectations and plans to match the formats that can be utilized in a specific situation. By asking the instructor to clarify his or her purpose for a particular activity, the producer can select the production equipment and/or techniques that will best serve that purpose, insuring an optimal match between academic content and video or audio display.

The producer also can be helpful in guiding the instructor to present him or herself most effectively, offering suggestions for apearance, dress and bahavior on camera that will minimize distractions and enhance delivery. The ideal producer visits the instructor during presentation of a live class on campus, to determine hthe presentation style away from the intimidating circumstances of the studio; this allows the producer to ascertain the instructor's natural teaching style, mannerisms, and tone, as well as to consider how they can be adapted to accomodate the constraints of telecourse delivery. The producer should schedule some rehearsal time with the instructor, to familiarize him or her with the studio and its equipment and to practice coordinating and directing with the instructor's verbal and nonverbal cues. A thoughtful producer uses both knowledge and skills in video production to allow the instructor to appear to best advantage, adjusting lighting, camera angles and set design to minimize unattractive physical features and capitalize on effective presentation mehcanisms such as gesturing. The instructor and producer also should watch the initial class session tapes together to look for both weaknesses (undesirable mannerisms such as grimaces, nervous gestures, vocal sounds) and strengths (suble but clear cues, good use of visual materials and other props) and to work out mutually satisfying strategies for enhancing the telecourse delivery. It is important that the instructor trust the producer to make such suggestions and not take offense at them; after all, both partners have a stake in making the presentation as effective as possible.

Developing a Productive Instructor-Producer Relationship

The keys to a productive instructor-producer relationship are 1) relationship building activities; 2) collaborative efforts; and, 3) coordinated action.

Relationship Building Activities

Once the telecourse has been scheduled and personnel assignments have been made, the producer and instructor should meet as soon as possible to begin the process of building an effective working relationship. Open, honest discussion to explore the beliefs and needs of each party is essential to effective communication. A tour of the television facilities and equipment to be used can be a helpful way to "break the ice" and initiate conversation. Developing a satisfactory mutual relationship right from the start is critical to the success of any telecourse effort.

The instructor, who appears on camera and is the nominal head of the course, is particularly vulnerable to relationship failures, because student evaluations, peer reviews, and ultimately, tenure and promotion decisions will rest, at least in part, upon hhis or er telecourse teaching. To come across as a confident telecourse instructor, the instructor needs to have absolute confidence in the producer as an ally and a friend. Production policies that require assigning different producers or substituting producers at the last minute only undermine the instructor's confidence and prevent opportunities for partnerships to form and grow.

The producer, who may be assigned to work with other telecourse instructors, may also be hurt by relationship failures, since his or her reputation and continued employment as a broadcast professional depends, at least in part, on creating high quality productions as viewed by peers or supervisors. The competent instructional television producer is committed to maintaining broadcast standards even while insuring instructional effectiveness. Production policies that do not allow producers to spend sufficient consulting with instructors and preparing telecourse productions, especially in the beginning, mitigate against the formation of genuine partnerships and limit the producer's confidence in the chances for the team's success.

Collaborative Efforts

The most meaningful and productive instructor-producer relationship evolve gradually over time and long-term relationships can result in genuine collaborative efforts, with each party enhancing the effectiveness and professional development of the other. Instructors who master the rudiments of telecommunications technology can challenge the producer to achieve new creative heights in broadcast quality. Producers who are familiar with the instructor's content and style can experiment to add special effects to class sessions. The ability to anticipate and react in a timely fashion to each partner's actions is clearly an essential component of telecourse production. Yet, this coordination is a skill that requires time and nurturance to develop; consequently, plenty of time and continuing contact are critical for the development of meaningful collaboration.

A good working relationship between two such different people as an instructor and a producer will necessarily be a dynamic, evolving process characterized by many lively discussions (and sometimes even arguments) between two strong personalities with differing views of teaching and learning. Each person must respect the other's expertise and philosophy, and together they must forge a shared vision of the telecourse that both are committed to creating and implementing. Without such an image to guide their efforts, the instructor and producer may work at cross purposes or even against their own possibility of success.

Coordinated Action

Coordinated activity is critical to insuring the success of joint efforts by any two individuals with such different roles and responsibilities as the instructor and the producer. Coordination implies that each person is aware of what actions the other will take and what his or her response to each should be. But, who directs or controls the telecourse? Ultimately, the instructor maintains control over the telecourse, since it is his or her reponsibility to teach the course and help the students to learn. Upon closer inspection, however, it becomes apparent that the instructor directs the action or content, while the producer directs the display or technology. It is critical that the instructor operate within the confines of the technology and respect the producer's suggestions as to how to best make use of it.

Coordination is best accomplished through proper planning and is most easily done by means of some kind of script or outline for each broadcast. Although the instructor is generally responsible for preparing the script because it will depend heavily on content, the producer may also modify the script to provide additional information about the use of specific audio and video formats or to outline information needed by other production personnel, suc as camera or audio operators. A broadcast script can be as simple as a brief outline of content topics, instructor actions, graphic screens, tape segments, and student activities; such an outline allows the producer to prepare materials, arrange equipment, and brief production personnel during the broadcast to facilitate a smooth delivery. More elaborate scripts may be needed for courses or individual class sessions that use a wider variety of audio and video formats, incorporate guests or live demonstrations, or involve interactions with students at distant sites. The more diverse and complex the instructional activities to be implemented during a broadcast the more urgent the need for the script and the greater the need for detail in directions.

To coordinate on-air delivery during each broadcast session, it is essential that the instructor agree on a set of cues for directing each event. Usually, such cues will be issued by the instructor as a verbal statement, such as "Why don't we review the _____" or "Let's watch the videotape" or "Here's an example of ___". When instructor and producer

become more accustomed to working together, they can identify key words (in these cases: review, watch, example) which the instructor can use to vary his cues so that the presentation is less predictabel and more interesting, substituting "Here's a review of ___" or "Now for a review of ___" or "In review". Some teams may choose to use nonverbal cues, generally movements exhibited by the instructor which indicate some action to follow. For example, an instructor about to need the overhead camera will pick up a pen to write or pointer to illustrate, or may glance in the direction of the display. When the producer has spent many hours observing the instructor, he or she will be able to identify even more subtle signs to serve as cues: a change in tone of voice, a slight movement of the eye or head, an indrawn breath that will allow a response to be made even more quickly and unobtrusively to the instructor's direction. Just as dance partners can sense and respond to and anticipate each other movements, so can instructor and producer can learn to coordinate their respective actions to produce a synchronated production.

Evaluation

Perhaps the most important phase of instructor-producer collaborative efforts occurs during the evaluation of telecourse class sessions, especially during the beginning of the partnership or later, whenever innovations are introduced or problems occur. Instructor and producer should allow sufficient time to view all or part of the session together soon afterward, pausing the tape to examine and discuss specific segments, fast-forwarding to areas of concern, or rewinding to compare and contrast different segments. Such review should not just focus on difficulties and failures but should also allow time for enjoying successes, such as a tricky maneuver successfully executed or a skillful escape from a difficult situation. In depth analysis of why a particular technique worked well or a segment came of smoothly also enables the team to make explicit how best to work together in the future or suggest ways for changing routines that are not currently working well.

Strategies for Developing an Effective Working Relationship

Here are some strategies offered by an instructor-producer team with over six (6) years of successful team work producing a wide variety of telecourses in special education:

1. Spend sufficient time together that you come to understand and appreciate each other's knowledge, working style, strengths and weaknesses.

2. Observe the other at work . The producer should attend one or more nontelevised classes taught by the instructor to get an idea of her style and personality and typical activities; the instructor should watch the producer in the control room during a telecourse similar in content and format to her own to learn what it takes to accomplish course goals. The instructor needs to understand the complexity of each production activity (e.g., the amount of time and specific actions required to set in motion a tape roll-in , to set up a camera shot for a demonstration or to cut to a student response) in order to plan appropriately to incorporate these formats into his or her own class sessions. The producer needs to understand the instructor's style and purpose to select the equipment, personnel and set design that will be most appropriate for use.

3. Share your individual areas of expertise so that each partner understands the other's perspective well enough to support yourmutual goals. The instructor needs to explain the rudiments of content so that the producer recognizes key concepts and principles. In fact, working over time in the same discipline, some producers begin to understand the content well enough to offer suggestions for materials and activities to represent certain topics effectively through video or audio channels.

4. Devise specific delivery formats to accomplish you mutual goals, matching technical procedures within the domain of the producer to content purposes identified by the instructor;. Developing scriptedroutines for activites that occur on manyt different occasions (e.g., discussion groups, role playing exercises, videotape segment introductions), preparation time is reduced for both instructor and producer and chances are increased that the broadcasts will operate smoothly.

5. Critique your work. After each class session, instructor and producer should discuss what worked well and what fell apart and make notes about successful formats or techniques. It is especially helpful to review a videotape of class sessions together, pausing or replaying the tape to examine and study segments. Tape review sessions are critically important when an instructor and producer first begin to work together, because they allow each to examine the same phenomenon, offer individual perspectives and suggestions, and jointly arrive at a mutually agreeable decision about how to refine the successful strategy or modify the unsuccessful one.

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Successful partnerships in any endeavor take time and effort to develop, and the instructor-producer relationhip is no exception. aObviously, an ongoing relationship between one producer and one instructor across one or more telecourses clearly results in the most productive working relationships. A producer who has worked with the same instructor across several semesters not only begins to know the highlights of the academic content , supporting the instructor's purpose more effectively, but he or she also can begin to find new uses of video technology to enhance the content and delivery. An instructor who has become familiar with a given producer grows to trust his or her suggestions for change and understand the technology well enough to make more sophisticated uses of it. Also, both team members need to nurture a sense of comradeship and genuine empathy that fosters confidence that each will promote the best interests of the other and the team during the broadcasts as well as after them.

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